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ABSTRACT

To test whether a positive relationship exists between perceptions of school press function and acceptance of First Amendment protection for school journalists, high school newspaper advisers in the public schools of an east coast state were surveyed concerning their understanding of and attitudes toward both student press freedom and student press function. Student editors were also questioned about their views toward student press freedom. The results gave no indication that advisers' understanding of student press law affected their attitude toward students' First Amendment rights or their attitudes toward student press function. It was not apparent from the analysis that advisers' experience, education, or attitudes influenced their perception of student press role. Both objective and subjective data indicated that student newspaper editors tended to have a narrower idea of student press freedom than did their advisers. While both advisers and editors overwhelmingly supported the coverage of controversial topics in the student press, both groups appeared to feel that such items may also be banned if they are "in poor taste" or do not represent "good journalism." Censorship occurred least where advisers and editors worked closely together to determine material suitability. The results showed a continuing trend toward improved recognition of student journalists' rights. However, it is also apparent that both philosophically and in practice, advisers and editors do not recognize the full measure of First Amendment press freedoms the courts have granted to student journalists. (A copy of the survey questionnaire is included.) (HTH)

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EDITORS' AND ADVISERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOLASTIC PRESS FREEDOM IN MARYLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Abstract

EDITORS' AND ADVISERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOLASTIC PRESS FREEDOM IN MARYLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A review of federal court rulings found that the courts have given public school student journalists constitutional protections that are very similar to those of professional journalists on the premise that, as government agencies, schools have created a forum in establishing a school publication with which they can not interfere. The major difference between scholastic and general press protection is that press freedom does not extend to material and substantial disruption of school activity.

This study examines how the constitutional rights of student journalists compare with those of professional journalists and tests what effect, if any, student newspaper advisers' perceptions of student press role and other factors have on advisers' attitudes toward student press freedom.

Advisers in Maryland public schools were surveyed concerning student press function and student press freedom. Student editors, too, were questioned and reaveled that they are more conservative in their views of student press freedom than their advisers.

During the 1960s and 1970s students developed a new awareness of themselves as a unique and separate social force, with the same need for self expression as any other public. While many would argue that the student press should enjoy all the First Amendment freedoms accorded the general press, others claim the special needs of the school preclude full protection for student publications and speech.

A review of federal court rulings shows that the courts have given public school student journalists constitutional protections that are similar to those of professional journalists. These protections are granted on the premise that, as government agencies, schools have created a forum in establishing a school publication (Staver, 1979; Gillmor and Barron, 1978).

In general, government agencies may not interfere with the use of forums they have created unless that use threatens a "clear and present danger" to society. With regard to schools, interference requires the less stringent test of "material and substantial disruption." In this sense, the courts have decided that schools can tolerate less disruption than society at large, and have allowed school officials greater control over student publications than state or federal governments hold over the non-student press (Huffman and Trauth, 1981).

Control by school officials is limited, however, to rules that are reasonable and include procedural safeguards that will assure that students have due process of law in the review of their publications. The courts, as well as educational associations

and student advocate groups, have recommended guidelines for school publications to protect the rights of both students and school officials (Stevens and Webster, 1973; Simpson, 1978-79).

Previous surveys of student editors, publications advisers and school administrators have found that there is far more censorship of student publications than is legally valid considering the court precedents set over the last ten years. Many of the surveyed schools had no guidelines for student publications or procedures for censorship appeal. The studies indicate that this was largely because school officials either were ignorant of or disregarded the legal status of the student press. However, it may also have been because administrators and advisers tended to see student publications as instructional tools, rather than as the forums for student expression that the courts have recognized.

Until recently, scholastic press scholars indicated that the primary function of school publications was to teach pupils how to write and meet deadlines. They noted that school publications could also be used to promote school unity and spirit (Roemer and Allen, 1926). The importance of a school publication as a forum for student expressions or as a "watchdog" of school policies—accepted general press functions—was rarely mentioned.

Growing awareness of students' political rights, plus a more definitive finding by the courts that scholastic publications enjoy nearly complete constitutional protection, have encouraged the forum theory of scholastic press function. Increasingly, educators accept the importance of scholastic publications in the

exchange of student ideas. They believe that stressing scholastic press freedom instructs students in important democratic ideals. Unfortunately, this belief is not always applied by advisers and administrators to the actual operation of high school publications and most students are not aware enough of their rights to demand them when they are threatened.

Maryland high school editors and their advisers are no different than their counterparts across the United States. Their work is comparable with work done at other schools, based on the national rankings of school newspapers, yearbooks and literary magazines. Their attitudes and perceptions were thought to be similar to those held by other students and their advisers. This study was designed to establish whether Maryland student editors' and their advisers' views of scholastic publication function affect their support for student press freedom. The hypothesis was that because high school officials, and sometimes students, see the primary role of the student press as journalism instruction, they are less concerned with assuring publication freedoms than if they believed the major function to be a forum for student expression.

Survey Methodology

To test whether there is a positive relationship between perceptions of school press function and acceptance of First Amendment protections for student journalists, questionnaires were sent to high school newspaper advisers and editors in Maryland's public schools during the fall of 1982 and spring of 1983.

Newspaper advisers were chosen because they represent both the interests of students and those of the administration. It is also the advisers who have the first opportunity to censor student press material. Newspaper editors were surveyed to provide a more complete picture of publication freedom and perception of student press role.

Adviser Survey

Advisers were queried about their understanding of and attitudes toward student press freedom, their conception of student press function, the actual practice of journalism in their schools and the extent of their journalism experience.

Advisers' understanding of student press legal status was measured by their response to several fictional situations representing cases on which federal courts have rules. This is a modification of a survey method used by Broussard and Blackman in their study of principals' censorship attitudes (1977). Because that method has been criticized for its use of composite cases—making it difficult to distinguish among the legal issues respondents react to—an attempt was made in this survey to limit each of the five cases to a single legal question.

Advisers were given a score for their legal understanding, based on the number of the five legal questions they answered correctly—with a score of 5 being the highest degree of understanding and a score of 0 being the lowest degree. This score was then compared with other responses to determine whether any positive relationship exists.

Advisers' attitudes toward student press freedom were measured by their agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

- School administrators should have the right to prevent publication of material they feel is damaging to the school's image.
- School administrators should have the right to prohibit publication and distribution of material that is not in an official school publication.
- Student journalists should enjoy the same First Amendment rights as professional journalists.
- School publications should avoid controversial topics in favor of stories which encourage school solidarity.

To judge adviser perception of student press function, the respondents were asked to select the most important function from among these choices:

- Fostering school spirit
- Providing students with information
- Serving as a forum for student expression
- Providing students with journalism experience

Questions related to the practice of journalism in the advisers' schools included whether the school has a set of publication guidelines (implying attention to student legal protection), whether the student publication covers news outside the school (indicating the degree of publication involvement with community events and issues), whether the publication regularly runs editorials and letters to the editor (demonstrating openness to criticism and controversy) and how the school newspaper is financed (indicating the degree of independence from administration

control the publication enjoys).

These questions were included under the assumption that the broader a newspaper's coverage, and the more open it is to comment and criticism, the more likely that student journalists are given the freedom to publish material without censorship. Financial independence also implies greater journalistic freedom.

Advisers could be more specific about the independence of their publications in two open-end questions asking the circumstances under which: (1) they would censor or (2) their administration has censored a student newspaper article. These questions allowed advisers to be more candid about censorship attitudes and legal understanding.

The final section on the advisers' type of school and journalism experience and education provide data on factors that might influence advisers' legal understanding, attitudes and press function perceptions. Journalism experience was measured by (1) years of teaching journalism, (2) general journalism education and (3) instruction in journalism law.

Editor Survey

School newspaper editors were asked the same attitude and press function questions as their advisers, to determine the extent to which their responses are the same.

In a third section editors were asked to describe their relationship with the adviser. Questions include one estimating the proportion of newspaper stories that stem from advisers' ideas

(indicating the degree of student influence in the publication content) and three discussing publication censorship, advisers' definition of inappropriate material and the fairness of editorial policies. Again, as with advisers, the open-end questions allow a more candid look at publication censorship than the objective ones.

Summary

In addition to measuring the frequency of advisers' and editors' responses to survey questions, 21 pairs of responses were examined.

Of 168 questionnaires that were mailed, only 45, or 27 percent, were returned. This is a relatively small sample that requires caution in analyzing the survey results. This is particularly true of the chi square test which normally needs a larger sample to be conclusive (Stempel and Westley, 1981). This may be the reason why statistically significant relationships were found for only 4 out of 21 pairs of responses.

However, the similarity of responses to the open-end questions indicates several strong patterns of application of and attitudes toward student press freedom in Maryland public schools. This compensates in part for the deficiency in sample size—although the exchange is a more general picture for a more specific one.

Survey Results

While student publications in Maryland public high schools appear to support the general idea of student press rights, this

support is not as extensive as that given to the student press by the courts. This is evident in survey data for actual journalism practice, as well as data on advisers' attitudes toward and legal understanding of student press freedom. Student editors' responses indicate that they are slightly more conservative in their attitudes than their advisers.

Data from the survey shows that there is a relationship for both advisers and editors between their perception of student press function and their attitude toward students' First Amendment rights to a free press (see Tables 1 and 2). This confirms the hypothesis: advisers and editors who see the same primary role for the student press as for the general press tend to believe that student journalists should have the same First Amendment rights as professional journalists.

TABLE 1

The Effect of Advisers' Attitudes Toward Student Press Function on Attitudes Toward the First Amendment Rights of Student Journalists

	First Amendment Attitude	
Student Press Function	Same for Students and Professionals	Different for Students and Professionals
Fostering School Spirit	0	0
Providing Students with Information	11	1
A Forum for Student Expression	9	1
Journalism Experience	8	8

N = 38
X^2 = 8 (.05 level of significance is 7.82, where the degree of freedom is 3)

TABLE 2

The Effect of Editors' Attitudes Toward Student Press Function on Attitudes Toward the First Amendment Rights of Student Journalists

	First Amendment Attitude	
	Same for Students and Professionals	Different for Students and Professionals
Student Press Function		
Fostering School Spirit	0	0
Providing Student with Information	24	1
A Forum for Student Expression	12	0
Journalism Experience	3	2

N = 42
X^2 = 9.35 (.05 level of significance is 7.82, where the degree of freedom is 3)

There is no indication that advisers' understanding of student press law affects their attitude toward students' First Amendment rights (see Table 3), or their attitude toward student press function (see Table 4). Advisers' legal scores do seem to relate positively, at statistically significant levels, with advisers' attitudes toward publishing material that is controversial (see Table 5) or might damage the school's image (see Table 6).

It appears that advisers in suburban schools and those with longer teaching experience and more journalism education tend toward higher legal scores than those in rural schools or with less education and teaching experience. However, these relationships were not found to be statistically significant under the chi square test.

TABLE 3

The Effect of Advisers' Legal Scores on Attitudes Toward the First Amendment Rights of Student Journalists

	First Amendment Attitude	
	Same for Students and Professionals	Different for Students and Professionals
Legal Score		
1	0	0
2	3	0
3	5	5
4	12	2
5	9	4

$N = 40$
$X^2 = 4.97$ (.05 level of significance is 9.42, where the degree of freedom is 4)

TABLE 4

The Effect of Advisers' Legal Scores on Attitudes Toward Student Press Function

	Student Press Function			
	Fostering School Spirit	Providing Information	Forum for Expression	Journalism Experience
Legal Score				
1	0	0	0	0
2	0	3	0	0
3	0	5	4	1
4	0	6	6	2
5	0	10	1	3

$N = 40$
$X^2 = 17.39$ (.05 level of significance is 21.03, where the degree of freedom is 12)

TABLE 5

Effect of Advisers' Legal Scores on Attitudes Toward Controversial Topics in Publications

	Controversial Topics	
	Should Include	Should Not Include
Legal Score		
1	0	0
2	1	2
3	0	12
4	1	14
5	0	12

N = 42
X^2 = 13.7 (.05 level of significance is 9.49, where the degree of freedom is 4)

TABLE 6

Effect of Advisers' Legal Scores on Attitudes Toward Articles Damaging School Image

	Articles Damaging School Image	
	Should Include	Should Not Include
Legal Score		
1	0	0
2	3	0
3	6	6
4	4	11
5	0	13

N = 43
X^2 = 13.98 (.05 level of significance is 9.49, where the degree of freedom is 4)

It is not apparent from the analysis of the available data that advisers' experience, education or attitudes influence their perception of student press role. However, these factors are themselves important to understanding the background and character of teachers who are advising student publications. This background provides implications for improving the quality of high school journalism, particularly with regard to student press rights.

Both from the objective data and from responses to the open-end questions it is apparent that school newspaper editors tend to have a narrower idea of student press freedom than the advisers. This is in spite of their greater tendency to see greater similarities between the student and the general press than advisers do. Since editors were not scored on their understanding of student press legal status, it is not possible to know if they understand the extent of student press rights.

While both advisers and editors overwhelmingly support the coverage of controversial topics in the student press, their response to open-end questions on story suitability indicate that controversial articles may also be banned because they are "in poor taste" or do not represent "good journalism." These are two highly subjective determinations that allow advisers wide discretion for censorship and that diminish student journalism freedom.

From these responses it is also evident, however, that there is the least censorship where advisers and editors work closely together to determine material suitability, through either formal

or informal staff discussions.

The presentation of survey findings begins with a profile of survey respondents, followed by a discussion of advisers' understanding of the legal status of student journalists, an analysis of their attitudes toward student publications and student press function and the apparent application of those attitudes and legal understanding to the actual production of a school newspaper. The final section discusses editors' attitudes toward student press function and the freedoms of student journalists, as well as individual anecdotes of student press censorship.

Profile of Respondents

Of the 45 questionnaires returned, the majority (59 percent) were from suburban schools, with 31 percent from rural schools and 10 percent from urban schools.

The advisers tended to be older, with 45 percent having seven or more years of teaching experience, 9 percent with five or six years, 22 percent with three to four years and 24 percent with one to two years.

The overwhelming majority did not major (93 percent) or minor (90 percent) in journalism for their college degrees. However, 55 percent had a least three credits in journalism course work. One quarter (26 percent) had nine or more journalism credits and 10 percent had 15 or more credits. Nearly half (45 percent) had had at least one course or workshop on journalism law.

Not quite half (44 percent) of the advisers had had some additional journalism experience beside advising school publications.

Of those, 45 percent had worked with either their own high school or college press. The remainder reported writing experience with community publications or limited outside editing, proofing or printing experience.

The advisers indicated that their newspapers primarily cover school news, with little comment or criticism. Only 9 percent said their publications regularly ran editorials and only 19 percent consistently included letters to the editor. While this does not preclude the discussion of controversial topics, it does show a lack of interest in school reaction and limits the use of the publication for a free exchange of ideas.

Only 14 percent of the advisers reported that their publications cover news that occurs outside of the school. This also indicates a very narrow focus in the Maryland high school press.

Despite court rulings and a consensus among journalism educators that written publication guidelines provide important legal protection for both students and administrators, only half of the schools represented in the survey have written guidelines. With the available data it is not possible to know whether this means that editors, advisers and administrators do not use guidelines because they are able to resolve fairly questions of story suitability through informal means, or whether advisers and administrators impose their story restrictions without regard for the legal implications of their censorship and so see no need for guidelines. There appears to be no specific relationship between a school's geographic location and its use of written publication guidelines (see Table 7).

TABLE 7

The Effect of School Location on the Use of Publication Guidelines

	Use Publication Guidelines	
	Yes	No
School Location		
Urban	1	3
Suburban	11	11
Rural	6	6

N = 38
X^2 = .94 (.05 level of significance is 5.99, where the degree of freedom is 2)

School publications in Maryland high schools are financed in a variety of ways and most employ more than one source of revenue. Most are also self-supporting, with two thirds using advertising and half using fundraising and/or publication sales to finance printing and other costs. Smaller numbers of publications get income from boards of education (31 percent), student fees (11 percent), the student government (4 percent) or parent-teacher association (2 percent).

This relative financial independence indicates greater potential for journalistic freedom than if the publications had to rely on the school administration for financing.

Advisers' Understanding of Student Press Law

The average legal score for advisers was 3.88, within a range from 2 to 5. Two thirds of the respondents scored correctly on four of the five questions, with 30 percent answering all five questions

correctly, 35 percent answering four, 28 percent answering three and 7 percent answering two.

Advisers were most often correct (93 percent) on the issue of whether an adviser can censor a four letter word from an article. They also had a high degree of accuracy for questions involving student criticism of the administration (86 percent) and articles on a controversial topic (88 percent). They were less accurate on questions of true but negative information about the administration (64 percent) and articles that might cause school disruption (69 percent). These results indicate that advisers' understanding of school press legal issues may be incomplete.

There appears to be a tendency for suburban schools to have the highest legal scores, followed by rural schools (see Table 8). There also seems to be a tendency for journalism advisers with more years of teaching experience, as well as those who have had a journalism law course, to have higher legal scores (see Tables 9 and 10). The trend toward having a journalism law course among advisers with more years of teaching experience may explain the higher legal scores among advisers with greater teaching experience.

Advisers in suburban schools appear most likely to have had a course in journalism law, followed by advisers in rural schools (see Table 11). This may explain in part why suburban school advisers tend to have the highest legal scores.

It also appears that advisers with high legal scores tend to include editorials and letters to the editor in their school newspaper (see Tables 12 and 13). However, there appears to be no

TABLE 8

The Effect of School Location
on Advisers' Legal Score

	Number of Correct Legal Responses				
School Location	1	2	3	4	5
Urban	0	0	2	2	0
Suburban	0	2	6	7	9
Rural	0	0	3	5	4

N = 40
X^2 = 4.21 (.05 level of significance is 12.59, where the degree of freedom is 8)

TABLE 9

The Effect of Teaching Experience
on Advisers' Legal Score

	Number of Correct Legal Responses				
Years of Teaching	1	2	3	4	5
1-2 years	0	2	5	1	2
3-4 years	0	0	2	5	2
5-6 years	0	0	0	2	2
7 or more years	0	1	4	7	7

N = 42
X^2 = 4.87 (.05 significance level is 21.03, where the degree of freedom is 12)

TABLE 10

The Effect of School Location on Advisers' Instruction in Journalism Law

Journalism Law Course or Workshop	Number of Correct Legal Responses				
	1	2	3	4	5
Yes	0	0	2	2	0
No	0	2	6	7	9

N = 41
X^2 = .44 (.05 significance level is 9.49, where the degree of freedom is 4)

TABLE 11

The Effect of School Location on Adviser Instruction in Journalism Law

School Location	Adviser Journalism Law Instruction	
	Yes	No
Urban	1	3
Suburban	11	11
Rural	5	7

N = 38
X^2 = .93 (.05 significance level is 5.99, where the degree of freedom is 2)

relationship between advisers' legal scores and their use of written publication guidelines (see Table 14).

TABLE 12

Effect of Advisers' Legal Score on the Use of Editorials in the School Publication

Number of Correct Legal Responses	Use of Editorials	
	Yes	No
1	0	0
2	3	0
3	9	3
4	15	0
5	13	0

$N = 43$
$X^2 = 7.37$ (.05 significance level is 9.49, where the degree of freedom is 4)

TABLE 13

Effect of Advisers' Legal Score on the Use of Letters to the Editor in the School Publication

Number of Correct Legal Responses	Use of Letters to Editor	
	Yes	No
1	0	0
2	3	0
3	11	1
4	11	4
5	12	1

$N = 43$
$X^2 = 3.22$ (.05 significance level is 9.49, where the degree of freedom is 4)

TABLE 14

Effect of Advisers' Legal Score on the Use of School Publications Guidelines

Number of Correct Legal Responses	Use of Publication Guidelines	
	Yes	No
1	0	0
2	2	1
3	3	8
4	10	5
5	7	5

$N = 41$
$X^2 = .86$ (.05 significance level is 9.49, where the degree of freedom is 4)

Advisers' Attitudes Toward Student Journalism

Although advisers supported the concept of legal rights for student journalists and the importance of keeping student publications free from authority censorship by school officials, they would not give student journalists the same First Amendment protection as professional journalists—or even the same legal status that student journalists have been given by the courts.

Advisers' differential attitude toward student journalists is particularly apparent in their perception of student press role. Nearly half (44 percent) felt that the most important function of the student press is to provide students with journalism experience. This education function has no equivalent among the roles recognized for the general press.

About one-third (30 percent) felt that the most important student press function was to provide students with information

and slightly more than one quarter (27 percent) felt that the primary role was to serve as a forum for student expression. No adviser felt that the most important function is to foster school spirit.

There appears to be no relationship between advisers' attitudes toward school newspaper function and the coverage of news outside the school (see Table 15), or the inclusion of editorials (see Table 16) or letters to the editor (see Table 17). Thus, while perception of student press function may influence an adviser's attitude toward student press freedom, it does not necessarily affect the application of this attitude in the student newspaper production.

TABLE 15

The Effect of Advisers' Attitudes Toward Student Press Function on Publication Coverage of News Outside the School

	Outside Coverage	
Student Press Function	Yes	No
Fostering School Spirit	0	0
Providing Students with Information	10	2
A Forum for Student Expression	8	3
Journalism Experience	16	2

$N = 41$
$X^2 = 1.28$ (.05 level of significance is 7.82, where the degree of freedom is 3)

TABLE 16

The Effect of Advisers' Attitudes Toward Student Press Function on the Inclusion of Editorials in Publications

	Editorials	
Student Press Function	Yes	No
Fostering School Spirit	0	0
Providing Students with Information	10	2
A Forum for Student Expression	11	0
Journalism Experience	17	1

$N = 41$
$X^2 = .25$ (.05 level of significance is 7.82, where the degree of freedom is 3)

TABLE 17

The Effect of Advisers' Attitudes Toward Student Press Function on the Inclusion of Letters to the Editor in Publications

	Letter to the Editor	
Student Press Function	Yes	No
Fostering School Spirit	0	0
Providing Students with Information	8	3
A Forum for Student Expression	10	1
Journalism Experience	14	3

$N_2 = 39$
$X^2 = 1.25$ (.05 level of significance is 7.82, where the degree of freedom is 3)

Despite the emphasis on the use of school publications for vocational training, advisers support the concept of student press rights—at least in theory. Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) agreed that student journalists should enjoy the same rights as professional journalists, and an overwhelming 95 percent believe that student publications should cover controversial topics. However, most would limit student newspaper writing by allowing administrators to censor articles that damage the school's image (72 percent) or ban publications that are not part of the official school press (58 percent).

It should be noted that there does not appear to be any tendency for advisers believing student journalists should enjoy the same First Amendment rights as professional journalists to have school publications that cover news outside the school (see Table 18) or include editorials (see Table 19) or letters to the editor (see Table 20).

TABLE 18

The Effect of Advisers' Attitudes Toward the First Amendment Rights of Student Journalism on Publication Coverage of News Outside the School

	Outside Coverage	
First Amendment Attitude	Yes	No
Same for Students and Professionals	25	0
Different for Students and Professionals	8	3

N = 39
X^2 = 1.65 (.05 level of significance is 3.84, where the degree of freedom is 1)

TABLE 19

The Effect of Advisers' Attitudes Toward the First Amendment Rights of Student Journalists on the Inclusion of Editorials in Publications

	Editorials	
First Amendment Attitude	Yes	No
Same for Students and Professionals	29	0
Different for Students and Professionals	10	1

$N = 40$
$X^2 = 2.73$ (.05 level of significance is 3.84, where the degree of freedom is 1)

TABLE 20

The Effect of Advisers' Attitudes Toward the First Amendment Rights of Student Journalists on the Inclusion of Letters to the Editor in Publications

	Letters to the Editor	
First Amendment Attitude	Yes	No
Same for Students and Professionals	25	4
Different for Students and Professionals	8	2

$N = 39$
$X^2 = .23$ (.05 level of significance is 3.84, where the degree of freedom is 1)

This dichotomy between philosophical and practical support of a free student press is also evident in responses to the open-end question asking under what circumstances the advisers would prevent publication of student articles. In addition to citing legally supportable justifications for censorship—such as libel (31 percent), obscenity (22 percent), or an invasion of privacy (8 percent)—advisers also listed many other reasons for censorship that would not be upheld in the courts.

These include "poorly written" articles (6 percent), articles in "poor taste" (18 percent), articles that were a "personal attack" on a member of the faculty or student body (13 percent), stories that might upset the administration (4 percent) and those that are "biased" (7 percent), "hurtful" (13 percent) or "unethical" (2 percent). These last reasons, as well as the finding that an article would be "disruptive" (18 percent) are highly subjective determinations, which, if loosely applied, could be misused to deny students full freedom of expression.

Many advisers indicated that questions of newspaper content were generally resolved prior to newspaper publication. Most advisers felt that a balance exists between what students want to print and what the school administration would tolerate. However, several felt that past conflicts with the administration had made them more stringent in their censorship than they were comfortable with. This was particularly true of advisers in rural schools.

One rural school reported that censorship occurred:

> ...until recently, only if the story could be damaging to a student or students personally, or if the material were libelous or obscene. However, after a recent article which contained the words 'pissed off' in a direct quote, I was written up by my principal and supervisor. To keep my job my censoring may become more pronounced.

Another rural school adviser wrote:

> Articles would be censored if they threatened my position. I realize this is not 100 percent legal, not is it ethical, but I have been in the hot seat for allowing freedom of the press and the fire burns.

A third rural school adviser would not necessarily use censorship to control student publications but said that, "After clearly discussing vulgarity I'd not halt publication but would fire and flunk the editors after publication." This, of course, would have the same dampening effect on a free student press.

Advisers report few instances in which school administrators actually withheld a story of the entire newspaper from publication. The seven incidents reported included censorship based on stories that were true but negative in tone, articles in poor taste and stories containing vulgar language. Given the few examples of administration censorship and the breadth of reasons for which advisers themselves would withhold an article from publication, it may be that whatever censorship exists is done by the adviser before the material is seen by the administration.

Editors' Attitudes Toward Student Journalism

Student editors of Maryland scholastic publications tend to be more conservative in their attitudes toward student press freedom in some areas than the school officials advising these publications.

Most (79 percent) believe that administrators should be able to prevent publication of material they feel is damaging to the school's image. This compares to the 72 percent of advisers who felt that way. While a large portion (81 percent) felt that school newspapers should not avoid controversial topics, this is a significantly smaller portion than the 95 percent of advisers who believed this.

However, while 72 percent of the advisers said that student journalists should have the same First Amendment protections as professional journalists an overwhelming 93 percent of students support the parallel legal status.

Just over half (56 percent) of the editors believed administrators should be able to ban unofficial publications, which is very close to the 58 percent of advisers who felt this way.

The greatest distinction between editors' and advisers' attitudes is in the perception of student press function. Only 12 percent of the editors identified journalism training as the most important role, compared to the 44 percent of advisers who responded that way. Nearly two-thirds (61 percent) of the editors cited the information role as the primary function. This is twice the number of advisers with this response. The 29 percent of students citing the forum function parallels the 27 percent of advisers recognizing the significance of this role.

The attitudes of editors and advisers in the same school, on the question of student press function, are most often parallel for the information function and next often in the forum role.

Two thirds (66 percent) of the editors say their advisers provide ideas for one quarter or fewer of the stories that are published. This indicates a high degree of student freedom in the selection of story topics, although not necessarily in the treatment of those topics.

Most (87 percent) of the editors said that neither the school administration nor their advisers had ever prevented a story from

being published while they (the editors) had worked on the newspaper. The editors reported that in most cases they have the final say about what is published, but that advisers may recommend against publishing articles that: (1) lack news value, (2) deal with controversial topics, (3) are "in bad taste" or (4) explore sensitive issues. According to one student:

> Our page editor wrote a page on suicide. She had attempted it. Her parents said it would be damaging if printed, and they didn't want us to do it. Our adviser advised us not to print it.

In cases where there has been censorship, some editors felt they were not given sufficient explanations for the ban. Some reasons that the administration or advisers gave for censorship included: (1) editorial bias, (2) incorrect information, (3) offensive material such as drinking, drugs or sex or (4) criticism of the school administration. One editor wrote:

> At one point some of the staff members wrote belittling humor columns of the administration, school clubs and students. "After receiving a refusal of publishing the articles from the adviser, the journalists got their own advertisements and funds to publish their own humor newspaper.

Articles that editors believe advisers would find inappropriate for publication included: (1) items criticizing the school staff or students that might harm school solidarity, (2) examples of poor journalism (especially those that contain unsubstantiated information), (3) stories involving obscenity, libel or other illegal uses of the publication or (4) material that is "biased."

While some editors' examples of materials that advisers had or might censor would be found appropriate for censorship by the

courts, many would not. The elimination of articles that exhibit "poor taste," discuss controversial issues or criticize the school administration is not legal, according to past court precedents. There is little indication that the students are aware of the potential for this abuse, however. One editor was particularly concerned that the adviser was not discriminating enough and wrote:

> I have not encountered any subjects of which he has disapproved. Sometimes this worries me. In fact, I have edited (out) some scandalous material which otherwise would have gone to print with his approval.

Most (97 percent) of the editors believed that their publications' policies were fair. The one student who reported unfair policies said that the newspaper staff should have greater control over the publishing of editorials. Other students reported that staff consensus is usually the basis for editorials.

Summary

The results of this survey show a continuing trend toward improved recognition of student journalist rights that has been evident in other research since the Tinker decision. There is no evidence here of the widespread disregard for students' constitutional protections that the Kennedy Commission found a decade ago (Nelson, 1974).

It is apparent, however, that both philosophically and in practice advisers and editors do not recognize the full measure of First Amendment press freedoms the courts have granted student journalists. And educating those advisers and student editors is what the Secondary Division must continue to do.

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THE FREEDOMS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF STUDENT JOURNALISTS

Survey of High School Newspaper Advisers

This questionnaire is a survey of school newspaper advisers' understanding and attitudes toward the freedoms and responsibilities of student journalists. Please answer the following questions based on your full experience in teaching and advising student journalists. Any comments you wish to include at the end, regarding the survey or the issue of student press freedom, also would be helpful.

A. These questions concern your understanding of the freedoms of school newspapers and student journalists under the First Amendment of the Constitution. Indicate whether you have the legal right to stop publication or distribution of the school newspaper, or to withhold an article, in the following cases:

1) In an article about the new school principal reference is made to a law suit by parents in his previous school which led to the principal's dismissal. Can the adviser insist that the article be withheld?

YES _____ NO _____

2) A story in the school newspaper reports on student criticism of the principal for his imposition of new regulations. Can the adviser prevent publication of the paper?

YES _____ NO _____

3) A school newspaper editorial opposes the President's policy toward abortion. The adviser, under pressure from parents, halts the paper's distribution. Is he within his legal right to do so?

YES _____ NO _____

4) The school newspaper uses a "four letter" word with sexual connotations in one of its headlines. Can the adviser prevent use of the word in the headline?

YES _____ NO _____

5) An editorial in the school newspaper calls for students to protest the suspension of several students by gathering in the cafeteria for a rally at a specific time during a specific school day. Can the adviser pull the editorial from the newspaper?

YES _____ NO _____

B. Indicate whether the following statements demonstrate your attitude toward student journalism.

6) School administrators should have the right to prevent publication of material they feel is damaging to the school's image.

YES _____ NO _____

7) School administrators should have the right to prohibit publication and distribution of material that is not in an official school publication.

YES _____ NO _____

8) Student journalists should enjoy the same First Amendment rights as professional journalists.

YES _____ NO _____

9) School publications should avoid controversial topics in favor of stories which encourage school solidarity.

YES _____ NO _____

C. Check what you think the most important function of a school newspaper is.

10) Choose one.

_____Fostering school spirit

_____Providing students with information

_____Serving as a forum for student expression

_____Providing students with journalism experience

D. Answer the following questions regarding the practice of journalism in your school.

11) Does your school have a set of written publication guidelines?

YES _____ NO _____

12) Do you cover news that occurs outside the school?

YES _____ NO _____

13) Do you regularly run editorials?

YES _____ NO _____

14) Do you regularly run letters to the editor?

YES _____ NO _____

15) How is the school newspaper financed? _____

16) Under what circumstances would you prevent publication of a story students had written?

_____

_____

_____

_____

17) Has your administration ever withheld publication of a story or the newspaper? Under what circumstances?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Indicate your type of school and the extent of your journalism experience.

18) Is your school _____ public or _____ private

19) Is your school community _____ urban, _____ suburban or _____ rural?

20) How many years have you been teaching and/or advising student journalists?

_____ 1-2 years _____ 3-4 years _____ 5-6 years

_____ 7 years or more

21) Do you have a degree in journalism? YES _____ NO _____

22) Do you have another degree with a minor in journalism?

YES _____ NO _____

23) How many credits do you have in journalism courses (other than for a journalism degree)? _____

24) Have you taken a course or workshop in journalism law?

YES _____ NO _____

25) Describe any journalism experience you've had other than school teaching/advising.

_____

Survey of High School Newspaper Editors

This questionnaire is a survey of school newspaper editors' attitudes toward student journalism. Please answer the following questicns based on your experience with the newspaper in your school and without consulting your adviser.

A. Indicate whether the following statements demonstrate your attitude toward student journalism.

26) School administrators should have the right to prevent publication of material they feel is damaging to the school's image.

YES _____ NO _____

27) School administrators should have the right to prohibit publication and distribution of material that is not in an official school publication.

YES _____ NO _____

28) Student journalists should enjoy the same First Amendment rights of a free press as professional journalists do.

YES _____ NO _____

29) School publications should avoid controversial topics in favor of stories which encourage school solidarity.

YES _____ NO _____

B. Check what you think is the most important function of a school newspaper.

30) Choose one.

_____ Fostering school spirit

_____ Providing students with information

_____ Serving as a forum for student expression

_____ Providing students with journalism experience

C. Answer the following questions regarding your relationship with the newspaper adviser.

31) What portion of the stories in the newspaper represent ideas from the adviser?

_____ 0-25% _____26-50% _____ 51-75% _____ 76-100%

32) Has either your adviser or the administration prevented a story from being published while you've worked on the paper? If so, please give details.

_____

_____

_____

_____

33) What types of material are considered by your adviser to be inappropriate for publication in the newspaper?

_____

_____

_____

_____

34) Do you feel the editorial policies for your publication--whether they are written or unwritten--are fair? If not, why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____